

# Conference Organisers' Perceptions of Helsinki

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## Conference Organisers' Perceptions of Helsinki

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The purpose of this Bachelor's thesis is to identify whether conference organisers present Helsinki as a tourist destination or as a knowledge hub in their own field of expertise. The thesis was commissioned by the Helsinki Convention & Events Bureau. The research focuses on conferences that took place between 2013 and 2015.

The theoretical framework explains destination images and their relation to business tourism. Furthermore, it introduces the essential definitions of conference and conference tourism, including the main types of conferences, selection criteria as well as the relation between business and leisure tourism and different types of business tourists. Moreover, tourism statistics relevant to the topic are presented. For the research, a qualitative research method is used in form of content analysis.

The research results are divided into two parts; Helsinki being presented as a tourist destination and Helsinki being presented from a professional view point, the previous one being based on Visit Helsinki's 12 reasons to visit Helsinki, which are modified to better fit the research objective.

The results of the research indicate that Helsinki is mostly presented as a tourist destination. However, in that case the main focus is mostly on practical attributes, such as good connections and safety. Nonetheless, tourist attractions and Helsinki's maritime appeal ranked relatively high as well. Furthermore, a significant amount of conference organisers present Helsinki from a professional point of view.

Keywords: Conference Tourism, Destination Image, Helsinki

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## 1 Introduction

Helsinki is a well-known destination for leisure tourism, as well as for business tourism. The fastest growing sector of business tourism is conference tourism. Moreover, the number of conferences in Helsinki is increasing constantly. This thesis focuses on how conference organisers perceive Helsinki. The thesis is commissioned by the Helsinki Convention & Events Bureau.

This thesis is divided into two parts; the theoretical part and the research. The theoretical framework aims to give an understanding of a destination image as well as its relation to business tourism. Furthermore, essential definitions of conference and conference tourism are introduced. Chapter 3 focuses on conferences, including the two main segments of conferences, conference venues, demand and destination selection. A definition of conference tourism together with the relation and differences between business and leisure tourism and different types of business tourists can be found in chapter 4. Additionally, relevant tourism statistics are provided in chapter 5.

The research part of this thesis focuses on qualitative research, content analysis as well as the research results. Since a qualitative research approach in form of content analysis is used in this thesis, it is explained in chapter 6. The purpose of the research is to discover how Helsinki is presented from the perspective of conference organisers. The research aims to answer the question, whether Helsinki is presented by conference organisers as a tourist destination or as a knowledge hub of the conference's own field of expertise. The research results are presented in chapter 7.

## 2 Destination Image

Destination image can be defined as a person's thoughts, impressions and beliefs of a destination. It consists of different components. According to White (2004) and Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal (2007), a destination image includes two components, a cognitive and an affective one. The cognitive dimension focuses on views and knowledge about a destination, whereas the affective part contains emotions and feelings. Together the cognitive and affective components form the overall image of a destination. An overall destination image can include positive as well as negative aspects. However, White (2004) also adds a behavioural dimension in the definition of destination image. This behavioural element includes how a person acts towards a destination. White (2004) divided a destination image into a tangible and psychological part. The climate of the destination as well as the price level is part of the tangible aspect. The psychological part is similar to the affective component. Furthermore, the destination's uniqueness is important for the destination's image. (Byon & Zhang 2010, 510; Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal 2007, 64; Tasci & Gartner 2007, 413; White 2004, 309-310.)

According to Byon and Zhang (2010), tourists have three types of images of a destination; an organic, induced and complex image. The organic image is created by non-tourism related sources such as TV reports and books. An organic image can exist without a person's intention to visit a certain destination. However, Tasci and Gartner (2007) argue that an organic image includes everything that is not in the hands of destination marketers such as word-of-mouth marketing and visiting the destination. (Byon & Zhang 2010, 510; Hosany & al. 2007, 63; Jenkins 1999, 3; Tasci & Gartner 2007, 414, 416.)

The induced image is created by using a destination's promotional material such as brochures and websites as a source of information. A destination image is formed through the information that is provided by the destination marketers as well as how the consumer interprets the offered information. So, the perceived image is modified by the person receiving it. Nevertheless, a personal experience with the destination is also part of the image formation. The result of a direct experience of a destination belongs to the complex image. An image created by actual visitation is considered to be more realistic. Jenkins (1999) states that people have a more realistic image of a destination that is close to their home since it is more likely that the destination was visited by those people. Furthermore, there is a difference in the images of non-visitors, potential visitors and people who have already travelled to this specific destination. (Byon & Zhang 2010, 510; Jenkins 1999, 3; Tasci & Gartner 2007, 414.)

A projected image is how a destination is presented, whereas a perceived image is created by an individual's own understanding and interpretation of information about a destination,

which differs from person to person. Therefore, each individual's image of a destination is unique. (Byon & Zhang 2010, 510; Jenkins 1999, 3; Tasci & Gartner 2007, 414, 416.)

Furthermore, the positioning and marketing strategy is an important part of creating a successful destination image. Tourists' perception of a destination has an influence on the decision making process, behaviour at a destination and behavioural intentions. There is a direct influence on the intention to return as well as to recommend the destination. Additionally, it has an indirect effect through quality, satisfaction and perceived value. A city's overall image can be one reputation that covers all areas or a combination of different elements that form the overall reputation. Thus, a city as a whole can have a certain image, whereas several facilities have their own individual reputations. However, a city's image can include the history, heritage and famous people from that city as well as the personality of local people. Moreover, a city's internationality and being a capital city play an important role in the creation of a destination image. (Byon & Zhang 2010, 514; Hankinson 2005, 25; Jenkins 1999, 2; White 2004, 310.)

A research conducted by Hankinson (2005) examined destination image in relation to business tourism. Even in business tourism a destination's physical environment is considered most important. Furthermore, a destination's economic state, its accessibility and its business tourism facilities are part of a destination's image. The quality of accommodation and conference centres as well as the choice of venues is highly valued. Social facilities such as restaurants and shops are considered to be important along with the character of the local people and the size of the destination. (Hankinson 2005, 26-27, 29-30.)

Some of the attributes overlap between business and leisure tourism such as accessibility, local people, safety, security and the appeal of a destination. However, there are differences in the perception of facilities. In leisure tourism the suitability for children and different kinds of vacation are important, whereas in business tourism the focus lies on the quality and choice of venues and accommodation. Nonetheless, leisure activities are an important part of business tourism as well. (Hankinson 2005, 26-27, 29-30.)

Conference organisers pay attention to the quality of conference facilities and availability of accommodation when choosing a destination. Moreover, the cleanliness and attractiveness of a destination along with safety and security are taken into consideration. The least focus is put on sightseeing, nightlife, climate and cost of transportation. (Jetter & Chen 2011, 177,180.)

### 3 Conference

A conference is defined as an event for exchange of opinions, discussion, problem solving and consultation. The expression to define meetings differs depending on the place and size of the event. Small gatherings are called meetings, whereas huge meetings are usually called congress in Europe, conference in the UK and convention in the USA. Every conference discusses a specific issue. A conference consists of different sessions and usually lasts several days or one day. However, there is no time limit for a conference. Neither is there a periodicity in which a conference takes place. Most conferences also organise social and leisure activities for their participants. According to Buhalis and Costa (2006), it is difficult to find a proper definition for a conference since even the Union of International Associations (UIA) and the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) use different definitions for the same term. (Buhalis & Costa 2006, 57; Peis 2007, 5, 7-8; Rogers 2008, 20; Swarbrooke & Horner 2001, 5.)

According to Peis (2007), the conference industry in Europe is going to grow, regardless of competing destinations such as Asian cities. Furthermore, Peis (2007) predicts an oversupply of conference and meeting facilities since the demand of conferences does not increase as fast as new facilities are built. Additionally, new conference destinations challenge already known destinations. In Europe, approximately 80% of all conferences are domestic. Globally, 56.8% of conferences are held in Europe, followed by Asia (14.9%) and North America (13.9%). South America accounts for 6.4% of conferences. The least amount of conferences takes place in Africa (4.8%) and Australasia (3.2%). (Peis 2007, 13, 16, 62.)

The conference industry reacts sensitively and depends on the business environment and its changes, both, on a national and global level. Despite the economic downturn, the conference market is expected to grow. Nonetheless, certain destinations can be affected more than others. (Peis 2007, 62; Rogers 2008, 83.)

#### 3.1 Corporate and Association Conferences

Conferences are usually divided into segments which are based on who the initiators of the conferences are. Therefore, the conference sector consists of two main segments that make up most of the demand: conferences of business corporations and conferences of professional or trade associations. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 77.)

Corporate conferences are mainly organised by private businesses and account for most of the conferences. The purpose of corporate meetings is usually work-related and attendance is compulsory. Internal corporate meetings are small meetings that last for one day and are



aimed at the company's employees only. In contrast to internal meetings, external corporate meetings focus on the sector in which the company works and include external partners. Furthermore, there are more attendees at external meetings but usually fewer than 100. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 77; Holloway & al. 2009, 289.)

Association conferences are organised by different organisations such as professional or trade associations. The main purpose is to serve the members' interests, thus the conference focuses on discussion and information exchange. Association meetings usually take place annually and attract hundreds or thousands of delegates, while participation is usually voluntary. Consequently, the destination and a different venue, each time the conference is held, are important because they help to increase attendance. Once a conference took place at a specific venue, it is unlikely that the same association will held another conference at the same venue for several years. According to Davidson and Cope (2003), the main areas of these conferences are medical science, science, industry, technology as well as education and agriculture. Association conferences usually allow the delegate to be accompanied and consequently there is often a programme for the guests. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 78; Holloway & al. 2009, 289.)

Association conferences attract more delegates than corporate conferences. Many of the largest conferences are initiated by associations. Moreover, they are longer than corporate conferences. Davidson and Cope (2003) state that the average length of an association conference is 2.5 days, whereas a corporate conference only lasts for an average of 1.6 days. Furthermore, public sector conferences attract mainly regional delegates. Since association conferences are larger and longer, the lead time - which is the time from making the decision to organise the conference until it actually takes place - is longer as well. This is especially the case with international conferences where the lead time can be up to several years. Corporate conferences are more affected by the economic situation which is often due to the shorter lead times. Choosing a destination is faster and simpler for corporate conferences because it is often done by one person only. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 79; Holloway & al. 2009, 289; Rogers 2008, 24.)

Additionally, association conferences tend to take place in conference centres, while corporate conferences are held in meeting rooms of hotels that are near the company's headquarters. Moreover, delegates at association conferences tend to spend less money since they usually have to pay by themselves, whereas the company pays for corporate delegates. However, Davidson and Cope (2003) argue that the amount of money spent by association conference delegates depends on the subject of the conference. For example, delegates of a conference related to medical science have higher requirements of their accommodation and

spend more money in general than, for instance, attendees of a charity conference. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 80-81; Holloway & al. 2009, 289.)

### 3.2 Conference Venues

Most conferences and meetings take place in hotels that also offer meeting rooms. Hotels that are located in city centres and near airports are the most popular in the conference sector. Nevertheless, also hotels in suburban areas are often used. Furthermore, hotels can focus on business travellers during the weekdays and leisure tourists on weekends. Hotels have advantages over big convention facilities since they have the possibility to accommodate the conference attendees. This is time-saving because there is no need to travel from the hotel to the conference venue. Moreover, hotels that are located near conference centres provide accommodation for conference attendees. Meetings taking place in a hotel are considered to have a more familiar and personal atmosphere. However, hotels can only host smaller conferences and meetings because of a lack of capacity. Therefore, huge conferences are usually held in convention centres. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 15; Holloway & al. 2009, 89-90, 291; Peis 2007, 83.)

Conference centres are specifically built to host conferences and different types of meetings. However, different types of buildings such as factories, hospitals and prisons have been converted into conference centres. Conference centres have high quality technical equipment which is needed for hosting a conference. The location of conference centres is usually close to the city centre. It is an indicator that the city is active in the meeting and conference industry. Most of them have the capacity to host conferences with hundreds or several thousands of attendees, so they are mainly used for association conferences. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 94; Holloway & al. 2009, 289-291.)

Unusual venues are a trend in conference tourism, therefore their use is growing. Unusual venues are places that are not primarily designed for hosting conferences such as museums, castles, ships, sport venues and tourist attractions such as theme parks and zoos. A famous example of this is the Stade de France in Paris which can be used as a meeting venue for events with up to 5000 attendees. Hosting conferences creates additional income for those facilities. The main reason for choosing an unusual venue as a place for conferences is to increase the attractiveness of the event and to create a memorable experience for the attendees. Unusual venues are mostly used for small meetings. Exceptions are cruise ships which have bigger meeting facilities as well as accommodation for the delegates. However, unusual venues have their disadvantages. The primary use of the venue and the high-demanding conference market can create problems. Moreover, unusual venues are unlikely to

be used several times for the same conference, since their novelty value decreases. (Buhalis & Costa 2006, 60; Davidson & Cobe 2003, 103-105; Holloway & al. 2009, 292-293.)

Furthermore, universities and academic institutions also provide meeting facilities for smaller and larger conferences. Classrooms and lecture theatres have audio-visual equipment that can be used for the meetings. In addition to that, catering services are also available. Nonetheless, the use of a university's meeting facilities can be limited to vacation periods since their primary use is for teaching. Venues provided by universities are used when the costs are kept low, especially when conference attendees have to pay by themselves. Additionally, meetings and conferences that are organised by the university take place in their own facilities. Academic institutions benefit from having conferences and meetings because they create additional income. Universities earn less revenue per delegate than hotels but the number of delegates is higher. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 99, 101; Holloway & al. 2009, 292.)

For conference facilities, association meetings are less lucrative than corporate conferences but they are more consistent, which makes them important in the long term. Peis (2007) predicts an increase of mega-conferences and small conferences. Therefore, the need and existence of middle sized conference facilities decreases. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 122; Peis 2007, 79.)

### 3.3 Demand

The demand for conferences can be measured by the amount of meetings held as well as by the number of attendees. Due to the economic downturn, the number of corporate conferences decreased. The amount of association conferences remained steady and the overall number of all conferences increased. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 121-122.)

The average amount of participants for corporate conferences declined which is also related to the economic situation. Corporate businesses are more and more aware of the travel, accommodation and transportation costs and for this reason try to reduce the number of employees at meetings. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 122.)

In the association sector the average number of delegates increased. Davidson and Cobe (2003) state that the number of, for example, trade union meetings has decreased, whereas the number of attendees for those meetings grew. Moreover, there are specialist conferences that focus on acquiring knowledge and are related to new research and information. It attracts delegates who are familiar with the topic, so their motivation for attending is stronger. This explains the higher number of delegates. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 122-123.)

The length of both, association and corporate conferences has decreased in the past years. It is mentioned by Davidson and Cobe (2003) that conferences are not always seen as a benefit to the company. Therefore, the company does not pay for the employees to attend but the employees have to pay by themselves. Employees are then more aware of the costs and time becomes more valuable for them, consequently shorter conferences are preferred. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 123-124.)

### 3.4 Destination Selection

The physical aspects of a destination, such as suitable meeting facilities and accommodation are important for conference planners. Furthermore, also the attractiveness and safety of the possible destination is considered to be important. A destination also needs to have attractions for social programmes and good transportation networks as well as good value for money. (Buhalis & Costa 2006, 63-64; Peis 2007, 115, 117; Swarbrooke & Horner 2001, 62-63.)

For association conferences the value for money and the location are the most important factors when choosing a destination. Moreover, transportation, capacity and availability of the meeting facilities are ranked as important, followed by previous experiences of the venue and the quality of the conference venues and services. In the corporate sector the quality of the conference facilities is ranked as the most important factor, followed by the location and the capacity of the meeting facilities. The value for money is only ranked as the 6th most important after the quality of services and transportation. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 108.)

The choice of venues that can host a big conference is limited. Therefore, the choice of venue and destination is made at the same time. Nonetheless, the destination is usually chosen first with the accessibility and cost taken into consideration. The cost, convenience and time to travel to the destination are more important than a destination's actual location. Convenience and speed are especially valued by conference attendees that travel by air. For this reason, conference venues near destinations that have national and international airline connections have an advantage. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 110.)

Furthermore, a destination's image is important in the destination selection process. Images are created through personal experience, but most are formed through the media. It is difficult for destinations with no or a negative image to attract meetings. Due to the fact that images are not steady, successful events can improve a destination's reputation. Personal experience of a destination usually increases the image and those destinations are preferred over other, unknown destinations regardless of their good reputation. The destination image is especially important for association conferences because the participants can decide by themselves whether to attend the conference or not. For them, the destination image is al-

most as important as it is for choosing the same city for a holiday. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 111-112.)

### 3.5 ICCA and UIA

The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) is located in Amsterdam and was founded in 1963. It was founded with the purpose to involve the tourism industry in the international meetings industry. The ICCA collects information on locations and characteristics of international meetings. Furthermore, its aims are to collect data of the international association meeting sector and to build communication channels for its members in order for them to create and keep a competitive advantage. Nowadays, the ICCA has over 950 members from more than 90 countries and is consequently one of the most noticeable organisations in the meeting and conference industry. (Iccaworld 2015; Rogers 2008, 10.)

The ICCA defines international conferences as being held in frequent intervals in at least three different countries with a minimum of 50 participants. According to ICCA, Finland ranked 23rd in 2014 for international association meetings per country and 35th in the number of participants. Helsinki was listed as 23rd in 2014 for international meetings per city. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 73; ICCA 2015; Rogers 2008, 10.)

The Union of International Associations (UIA) was founded in Brussels in 1907. It is a non-profit and non-governmental organisation. The UIA gathers present and past information of international associations and focuses on promoting internationality of those associations. Moreover, the UIA provides information about international associations, their activities and meetings. Since 1949, the UIA collects data of worldwide international meetings that are chosen according to strict criteria. Those include conferences organised by international organisations. Meetings organised by national organisations are included, too, when they have at least 300 participants with a minimum of 40% foreigners from 5 or more different countries. Furthermore, the length of the conference has to be at least 3 days. In UIA's statistics Finland ranked 19th in 2014 for international meetings and Helsinki ranked 18th in the same year. (Peis 2007, 8; Rogers 2008, 13-14; UIA 2015; Visit Helsinki 2015a.)

However, since the data collected by UIA and ICCA represents only a part of the overall market in Europe, several countries conduct their own surveys to examine the demand for conferences and meetings. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 73.)

## 4 Conference Tourism

Business tourism is defined as travelling for work related purposes. Therefore, it is one of the oldest forms of tourism because people travelled for trade purposes since early times. Business tourism forms a big and fast growing part of the tourism industry. It includes travelling to attend or participate in business events. The four main areas are meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), but also congresses, conventions and expositions are part of business tourism. Furthermore, business tourism can be divided into domestic and international business tourism as well as short haul and long haul tourism. Conference tourism is defined as travelling to a destination for one or more days with the main purpose to attend or participate in a conference, both, domestic and international. Conference tourism increased faster than any other form of business tourism. In countries such as Great Britain, Norway and Sweden, conference tourism accounts for one fifth of the total business tourism. (Buhalis & Costa 2006, 56-57; Davidson & Cobe 2003, 4; Lomine & Edmunds, 18; Rogers 2008, 9; Tretyakevich & Maggi 2012, 391.)

### 4.1 Peak Season

The peak seasons for conference and business tourism are spring and autumn, but business events take place throughout the whole year. In northern countries, January, July and August are the months with the least business events because it is the peak season for leisure tourism and many people are on summer holidays. Moreover, business travel takes place primarily between Monday and Friday. (Rogers 2008, 27-28; Swarbrooke & Horner 2001, 28.)

### 4.2 Business and Leisure Tourism

Business tourism is closely connected to leisure tourism since business tourists mostly require the same facilities like accommodation and transportation as leisure tourists, but business tourists need additional services such as conference venues. Additionally, business tourists travel rather on weekdays than on weekends, since attending a business event is part of their work but after finishing their work, business travellers become leisure travellers too. (Holloway & al. 2009, 77; Rogers 2008, 26-27.)

In the case of conference tourism, there can be a social programme that includes leisure activities such as sightseeing tours, entertainment as well as visiting local restaurants. The attendees have an opportunity to socialise and network at a less formal event. Additionally, there are post-conference tours which take place once the conference is over. Research conducted by Tretyakevich and Maggi (2012) revealed that most of the conference attendees consider recreational and leisure opportunities as important. A further similarity between

leisure and business tourism is the need for accommodation and transportation. In addition to entertainment facilities, restaurants, stores and information services, also a safe and attractive destination is important for both, business and leisure tourists. It is important for a conference tourism destination to focus on its unique features and have a good infrastructure, especially in the accommodation sector. Additionally, in order to be successful, destinations have to be easily accessible. (Peis 2007, 81, 88; Swarbrooke & Horner 2001, 10, 64; Tretyakovich & Maggi 2012, 392.)

Usually a business traveller's company pays for the travel costs. Therefore, business tourists are less concerned about the travel costs than leisure tourists. However, companies are nowadays trying to keep the travel costs lower and, for example, rely on low-cost airlines. Peis (2007) mentions that a destination that is served by low-cost airlines has an advantage because their market share increases. (Holloway & al. 2009, 11-12, 53; Rogers 2008, 26-27; Swarbrooke & Horner 2001, 10, 64.)

Business tourists have no or only little influence on the choice of destination and the timing of their travel, contrarily to leisure tourists. Also attractions and sights at the destination are not a priority for business travellers, since they are not directly part of the purpose to travel. Therefore, business tourists might have to travel to destinations that are not favourite destinations for leisure tourism. However, this is mostly not the case for conference tourists. (Holloway & al. 2009, 53.)

#### 4.3 Types of Business Tourists

Business tourists do not always travel alone but take an accompanying person with them or decide to stay longer at the conference destination. Furthermore, business tourists can also return to the destination as leisure tourists. Those different types of business tourists are explained in the following chapter.

##### 4.3.1 Business Extenders

Business tourists who extend their stay at a destination by a couple of days before or after the conference or meeting are called business extenders. Davidson and Cobe (2003) state that people who are less used to travelling for work-related purposes are more likely to extend their visits than frequent business travellers. The decision if business tourists extend their visit is influenced by the distance from their places of residence. According to Davidson and Cobe (2003), business trips are more likely to be extended if the destination has not been visited before. The distance from business tourists' hometowns plays an important role as well. The cost of transportation at the destination and available tourism information also affect the

decision to extend a business trip. However, the most important factor is the image of a destination. In the case of association conferences the destination image influences if a delegate attends the event. (Buhalis & Costa 2006, 57; Davidson & Cobe 2003, 257-258, 265-266; Rogers 2008, 26-27.)

#### 4.3.2 Guests

Delegates may take accompanying persons with them, especially when a business event takes place in a destination that is far away. Davidson and Cobe (2003) state that approximately 30% of conference delegates in the United Kingdom and the United States are accompanied by a guest. For accompanying persons the main purpose of the trip is leisure. Therefore, the decision whether conference delegates take accompanying persons with them is influenced by the existence of a programme for guests. These programmes consist of activities such as sightseeing, visits and shopping for the guests while the delegates attend a conference. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 258; Swarbrooke & Horner 2001, 10.)

#### 4.3.3 Returners

Business tourists are more likely to return to the destination as leisure visitors if they had a positive experience and believe they had not seen everything during their stay. Furthermore, they have not visited the destination many times and thus are not too familiar with it. It is more difficult for popular destinations to attract business tourists as leisure visitors. However, according to Davidson and Cobe (2003), more than one third of business travellers attending conferences in the UK would return as leisure visitors. In general, visiting a destination for business purposes increases the likelihood of following leisure visits. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 261.)

#### 4.4 Impacts

Business tourism has both, positive and negative impacts on the host destination. Business travellers spend more money at a destination than leisure tourists, so there is a greater economic benefit for the destination. According to Davidson and Cobe (2003), business travellers spend two to three times more than leisure tourists. Furthermore, the money spent by business tourists is spread around the destination. However, Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) argue that most of business tourists' spending goes to transportation and accommodation companies which might not be locally owned. At the destination level, venues and specialised smaller providers as for instance photographers and audio-visual businesses benefit from conferences. Business travellers have a higher demand for quality accommodation and facilities. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 14; Peis 2007, 81; Swarbrooke & Horner 2001, 76, 82.)



Conference attendees stay together as a group, so it is easier to inform them about the local community and their habits. Consequently, it is easier to increase the enjoyment of business tourists' stay and also minimize the negative impacts on the local residents. Conference delegates move around in a group, using either public transportation or bus transfers, so the negative environmental impact is decreased. Compared to leisure tourists, business tourists travel more often per year. In particular, international business trips are made by air, which is a polluting way of transportation. (Davidson & Cobe 2003, 17; Rogers 2008, 28-29.)

#### 4.5 Image

Business tourism can create further investment in the destination when high-ranked business travellers who visited the destination on a business trip decide to establish business operations there. Furthermore, business tourists who have a positive impression of a destination, act as an unpaid marketing channel by telling friends and colleagues about their experience and the destination. Rogers (2008) states that those people are sometimes as important and influential as the destination's own marketing. An already existing image of a destination can be reinforced by business travellers. If a conference destination has created a good and unforgettable experience for business tourists, the chances they spread the word of mouth and return as leisure visitors are higher. Nonetheless, conference planners and attendees have increasing requirements and demands. The service quality is an important factor of satisfaction with conference facilities, the event itself and the destination. Therefore, high quality services need to be provided by destinations and venues in order to satisfy their customers. (Buhalis & Costa 2006, 63; Davidson & Cobe 2003, 16; Peis 2007, 78; Rogers 2008, 28.)

Tretyakevich's and Maggi's (2012) research discovered that conference delegates value experiencing a different culture as well as the possibility to visit the destination and a good destination image. Furthermore, getting away from the work routine and the distance from the conference venue to the city centre were considered to be important. Additionally, leisure activities such as excursions and pre- or post-conference tours are appreciated by conference attendees. The least important factors were the novelty of the destination as well as the programme for guests. However, Tretyakevich and Maggi (2012) mention that most conference delegates' expectations concerning the experience of a different culture were not fulfilled. Therefore, it is important that the leisure programme also emphasizes the local culture of the conference destination. (Tretyakevich & Maggi 2012, 392-393.)

## 5 Tourism Statistics

According to the Border Interview Survey conducted by Statistics Finland and the Finnish Tourist Board, there were 7.6 million tourists travelling to Finland in 2012, which is a growth of about 5% compared to 2011. The majority of visitors (47%) were from Russia, followed by Estonia and Sweden. The number of visitors from Russia increased by 10% and from Estonia by 7% from the previous year. 55% of tourists travelled to Finland for leisure purposes, an increase of 10% from 2011. Approximately 10% of tourists came to Finland to visit relatives or friends. Business travel counts for 21% of the total arrivals. In relation to 2011 the number grew by 8%. However, the total share of visitors for business purposes has decreased since 2007. For 9% of the travellers Finland was only a transit destination. The average length of stay in Finland was 4.1 nights. Nonetheless, 45% of foreign tourists did not stay overnight. The revenue created by conferences in Finland increased by 63% between 2010 and 2013. On average one conference visitor spends 1179€ during the stay. (Statistics Finland 2013; Visit Finland 2014.)

In 2013, there were 3.3 million overnight stays in Helsinki, which is a decrease of 3% from the previous year. The decrease was mainly due to the decreasing number of international business travellers as a result of economic recession. The majority of visitors (53%) were from overseas, especially from Russia, Germany and Sweden. Nonetheless, the biggest growth of international tourists was recorded for Japanese (+20%) and Chinese visitors (+11%). Approximately 16.6% of tourists in Finland stayed overnight in Helsinki. The average length of stay in Helsinki was 1.68 nights in 2013. (Visit Helsinki 2013, 2-4.)

The majority (54.5%) of travellers stayed in Helsinki for leisure purposes and 43.5% were business travellers. The remaining 2% visited for other reasons. The number of business travellers to Helsinki decreased since 2010. Despite the overall decrease in business travel, the number of domestic business travel increased in 2013. However, in 2014 the share of overnight stays in business tourism increased to 47.9%, which also included 150.000 more business travellers than in the previous year. Furthermore, the share of leisure travel declined to 49.6%. Visitors for other purposes counted for 2.5%. (Statistics Finland 2013; Visit Helsinki 2013, 2-4; Visit Helsinki 2014, 4.)

As shown in Figure 1, the number of conferences in Helsinki is constantly increasing. The number of international conferences in Helsinki increased by 13%, from 254 in 2012 to 288 in 2013. Nationwide there were 662 conferences. 44% of all conferences in Finland took place in Helsinki which was 4% more than the previous year, creating a new record. Also 44% of all conference delegates in Finland attended a conference in Helsinki in 2013. (Visit Helsinki 2013, 9; Visit Helsinki 2015b.)

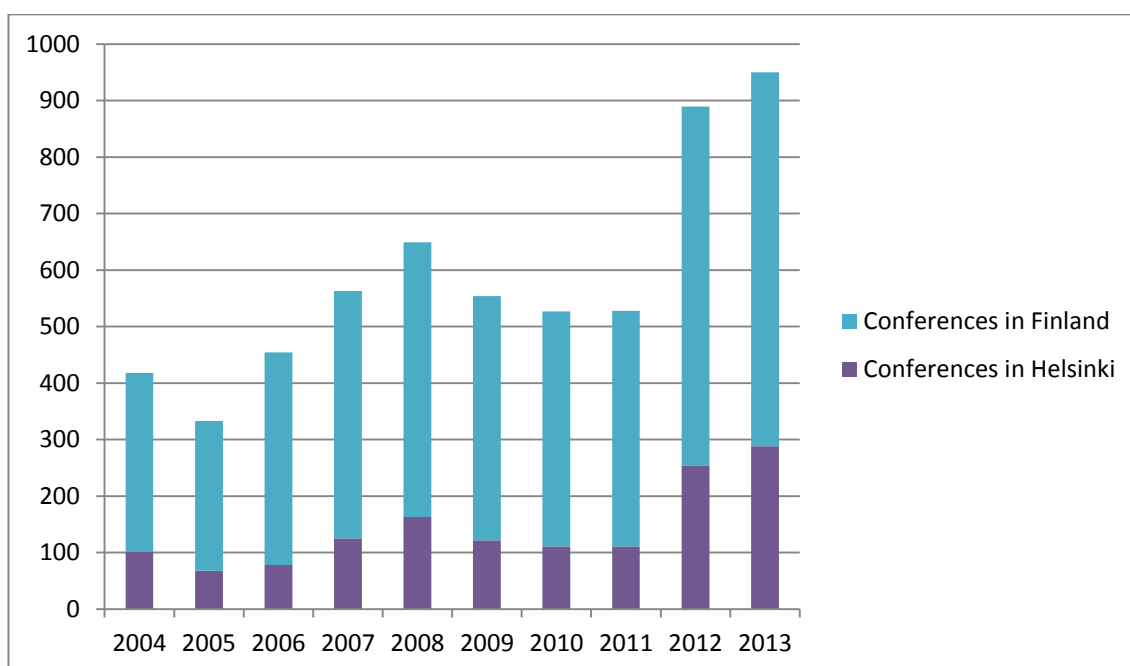


Figure 1: Number of conferences

As seen below in Figure 2, 2012 was a record year concerning the number of conference guests. However, in 2013 the size of the conferences declined and therefore the number of conference attendees in Finland decreased from approximately 77.000 in 2012 to 71.000 in 2013. Nonetheless, this is still more than in the years 2004-2011. The overall number of conference attendees in Helsinki decreased from the previous year by 23% from 40.000 to approximately 31.000 in 2013, whereas in 2012 more than half of all conference guests attended a conference in Helsinki. Nevertheless, the amount of conference attendees in Helsinki in 2013 is the second highest since 2004. (Visit Helsinki 2013, 9.)

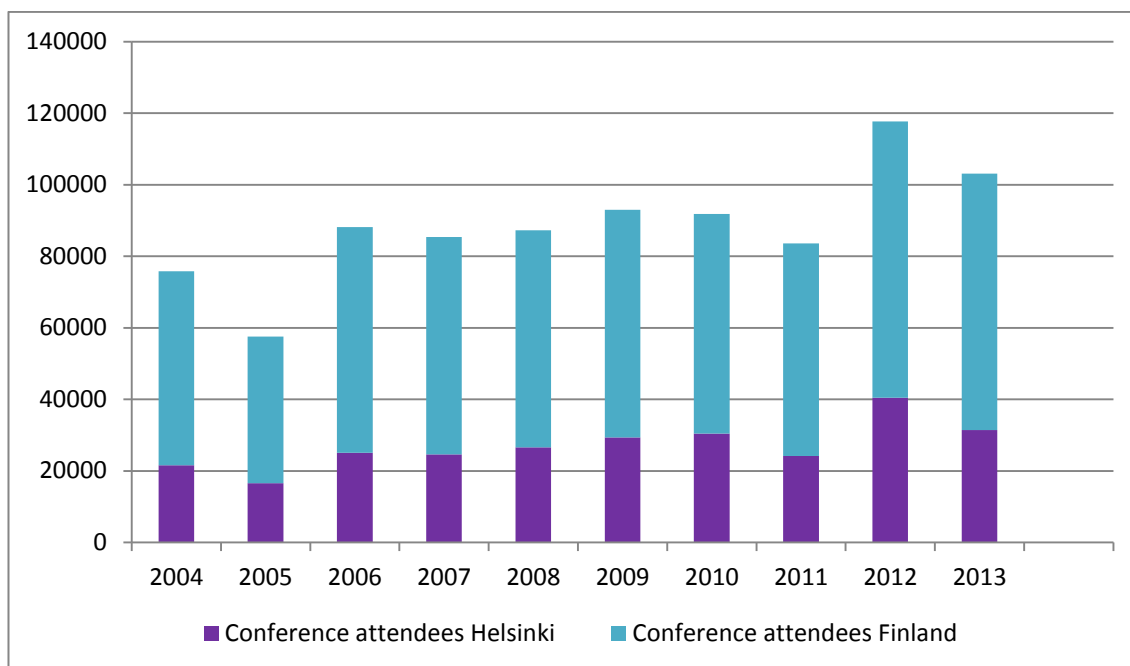


Figure 2: Conference attendees

## 6 Research

Research for this thesis was conducted by using content analysis, a qualitative research method. The research aims to discover, whether, in the field of conferences, Helsinki is presented as a tourist destination or as a knowledge hub where innovation and world-class science take place. For this purpose, the written parts of websites of conferences that took place in Helsinki during the years 2013 until the beginning of 2015 have been searched. The collected data is analysed manually through content analysis method which includes identifying reoccurring themes and defining and focusing on the important themes, so that the research question can be answered best.

### 6.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is used to measure meanings and phenomena in their natural setting. Thus, qualitative research is a naturalistic approach. Qualitative research focuses rather on words than on numbers, so it is used to examine smaller samples more in depth. Furthermore, certain themes such as cultural information are difficult to quantify. Therefore, qualitative research is conducted to measure behaviour, experiences, values and attitudes. (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 109.)

There exists an inductive and deductive research approach in qualitative research. An inductive research approach is based on collecting data to create themes, interpretations and con-

cepts of a specific topic when there is not enough previous knowledge about this topic; whereas in a deductive research approach already existing theories or models are tested and revised. (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 109.)

## 6.2 Content Analysis

Content analysis is used to analyse written, verbal or visual communication messages through describing and characterising their content. However, according to Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013), it is only used to analyse text. Nevertheless, it aims to draw conclusions from the data to their context, so the meaning of the data is evaluated. Moreover, it can be used to analyse both, quantitative and qualitative data. In qualitative research, content analysis allows the data to be analysed and interpreted in a quantitative way. Content analysis is a systematic and objective research approach. It provides new knowledge and understanding as well as a description of the characteristics of a document's content. As a result, phenomena are described using different categories and concepts. Content analysis of written and visual information such as guidebooks, travel brochures, photographs and websites provides significant material of the image of a specific destination. (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 107-108, 113; Jenkins 1999, 7-8; Krippendorff 1989, 403-404; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas 2013, 400.)

## 7 Research Results

The research results are divided and presented in two parts; a professional and tourist point of view. The tourist view of Helsinki is based on Visit Helsinki's 12 reasons to visit Helsinki. However, the 12 reasons have been modified to better fit the topic of the research. The original 12 reasons are: friendly locals, good connections, main attractions, design, architecture, maritime appeal, nature, events, between East and West, food culture, shopping and year around destination (Visit Helsinki, 2015c). "Events" have been left out because it was not considered to be relevant enough for this research. Additionally, "safety" was included in the research since it is an important aspect in conference tourism. "Nature" and "maritime appeal" have been combined to "nature and maritime appeal" because they were considered to be closely related. Furthermore, seasons and climate have been added to "year around destination" since they can also belong to this category.

All in all, there are the following 11 categories for Helsinki being presented as a tourist destination: Good connections, safety, nature and maritime appeal, design, friendly locals, between the East and West, architecture, shopping, year around destination, food culture and main attractions. Those categories are explained in more detail in chapter 7.1 and are followed by the results of the research in chapter 7.2.

The second part of the research results focuses on Helsinki being described from a professional point of view. This includes previous conferences, education and technology as well as Helsinki's success in studies, such as being ranked the most liveable city in 2011. Those results are explained in chapter 7.3.

### 7.1 Modified 12 Reasons

**Good connections:** Helsinki has good connections because it can be easily reached from around the world by plane, ferry and train. The Helsinki-Vantaa Airport is located approximately 20km from the city centre of Helsinki with about 200 arriving international flights per day. Furthermore, the airport is ranked amongst the best of the world.

There are ferry connections to and from Estonia, Sweden, Germany, Russia as well as Poland. St. Petersburg and Moscow can also be reached by train. All parts of Finland are served by train connections. The central railway station is located in the city centre of Helsinki, nearby the Kamppi Bus Terminal where long distance buses leave and arrive.

Helsinki's public transportation includes metro, tram and local bus services. It is considered to be very reliable with short distances between stops. However, due to the compact size of Helsinki, most of the attractions in the city centre are within walking distance. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

**Nature and maritime appeal:** Around one third of Helsinki is parks and green areas which makes it one of the greenest cities in the world. The parks are mostly used for relaxing, picnics and doing sports, in summer for jogging and in winter for skiing. Furthermore, Helsinki's green areas offer the possibility for birdwatching, especially the Kivinkka recreational area. Additionally, Helsinki is located at the sea. Approximately 300 islands and 100 kilometres of coastline are part of Helsinki. There are swimming beaches and opportunities for fishing, skating and sledding in winter. Many of the islands can also be accessed for recreational purposes. The most popular islands are Suomenlinna, Seurasaari and Helsinki Zoo, which is located on Korkeasaari. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

**Safety:** Helsinki is named one of the cleanest capital cities in the world because it has less noise and pollution than capital cities are usually associated with. Furthermore, its streets are considered to be tidy and safe. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

**Between East and West:** Helsinki is influenced by the East and the West which is visible in its architecture, traditions, food culture and events. In architecture, the different influences are most visible in the two main cathedrals; the Lutheran Helsinki Cathedral and the Orthodox Uspenski Cathedral which is the largest Orthodox church in Western Europe. Furthermore, there is a statue of Alexander II in Senate Square and the Tsarina's Stone in Market Square.

Also the local cuisine includes elements from the East, such as oven cooked meals and the use of rye and barley. Moreover, the Helsinki-Vantaa airport is a bridge between the East and West since there are flights to and from the USA as well as destinations in Asia. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

**Architecture:** Helsinki's architecture includes Neoclassicism, Art Nouveau, contemporary architecture and works by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. In general, Helsinki's architecture is defined as Nordic minimalism and refinement. Styles from different periods and past centuries are noticeable in Helsinki's architecture and different districts are influenced by different styles, such as the historic city centre, Eira and Katajanokka. An example of Neoclassicism is the Senate Square with some of the buildings being built in the 1640s, including a town hall, a cemetery and the Lutheran Helsinki Cathedral. During the early 20th century buildings in the Art Nouveau style were built, for example, the National Museum of Finland. The influence of the functional style, which followed the Art Nouveau movement, is visible in the central railway station. Contemporary architecture also includes wooden architecture. Examples of this style are the Kamppi Chapel of Silence and the Culture Sauna. The building of Kiasma, the Museum of Contemporary Art, is also an example of contemporary architecture. Famous works of Alvar Aalto include Finlandia Hall and Kulttuuritalo. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

**All year around destination:** Depending on the season, Helsinki has different events and activities. In summer, the days are the longest. During that time there are many festivals and outdoor events in Helsinki. Moreover, the parks, terraces and islands are popular places. In winter the days are short and there is snow. People can be found ice skating on the frozen sea and during the Christmas season there are Christmas markets. During spring the days get longer and the weather becomes warmer, whereas in autumn the autumn colours can be seen. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c; Visit Helsinki, 2015d.)

**Main attractions:** One of Helsinki's main tourist attractions is the sea fortress Suomenlinna which is located on several islands near the coast of Helsinki. It is one of the biggest maritime fortresses in the world and listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1991. Suomenlinna was built in the 18th century in order to control the entrance into Helsinki's harbour. Suomenlinna's military use stopped in the 1970s and it was turned over to civilian administration. Nowadays, only the Naval Academy is located on the island. However, Suomenlinna already started to become a popular attraction in the 1960s. Around 190 buildings and several kilometres of walls have been preserved. Furthermore, there are museums and restaurants as well as events that take place on Suomenlinna. (UNESCO, 2015; Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

The city centre of Helsinki includes the Senate Square which is surrounded by the Helsinki Cathedral, the Government Palace, the University of Helsinki and the National Library of Finland. The buildings were designed by Carl Ludvig Engel in the 19th century. The area near the Senate Square includes the Esplanade Park, the Market Square and the South Harbour where ferries arrive and depart. Additionally, the Uspenski Cathedral is a famous tourist attraction. It is the largest Orthodox church in Western Europe. The most visited architectural tourist attraction is the rock church, which is a church that was built in a rock. Another popular attraction is the monument of the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. The sculpture resembles organ pipes and is located in the Sibelius Park. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

Another part of Helsinki's main attractions are museums, such as the National Museum of Finland. It presents the history of Finland from the prehistoric era to the present. Ateneum, an art museum and the National Gallery of Finland, has exhibitions of Finnish art from the 18th century to the 1960s. Modern art is displayed in the Museum of Contemporary Art, Kiasma. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

**Design:** Finnish design started to become internationally known in the 1950s. Its characteristics are clean lines and minimalism as well as modernism from the 1950s. Design forms a part of Helsinki's lifestyle. It ranges from old design traditions and furniture to modern design. The most popular Finnish designs include Marimekko, Iittala, Arabia and Alvar Aalto. Finnish art glass, orange Fiskars scissors and Alvar Aalto vases are part of the most famous design products. There is a Design District in Helsinki which includes shops, galleries, museums, studios and restaurants that are related to design. The history of Finnish design is told in the Design Museum. Design is also included in architecture and city planning. Furthermore, Helsinki was named the World Design Capital in 2012. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c; Visit Helsinki, 2015e.)

**Friendly locals:** Helsinki's residents are friendly, willing to help and have good English skills. Local people gather at different events such as flea markets, block parties and restaurant day. Moreover, big events and festivals take place in Helsinki. During summer locals meet in parks, terraces and also in cafes and bars on weekends. Helsinki is also known as an international university city. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)

**Shopping:** Helsinki has several stores of famous Finnish design brands such as Marimekko. Furthermore, there are shopping centres and the biggest shopping mall of northern countries, Itis, is located in Helsinki, outside of the city centre. One of the most famous department stores in Helsinki is Stockmann which is located near the main shopping streets. Moreover, there are plenty of souvenir shops in the city. (Visit Helsinki, 2015c.)



Food culture: Helsinki is known to be a diverse restaurant city with over 1200 restaurants. The cuisine focuses on Nordic ingredients. The food culture is considered to be unique and authentic. Helsinki has local food, Michelin- starred restaurants as well as many pop-up restaurants and food events throughout the year. Moreover, there are several outdoor markets, as well as market halls, as for instance Hietalahti Market Hall. Four times a year there is the so called Restaurant Day. During that day, there are several pop-up restaurants and street kitchens at many different locations, such as street corners, a garden or park, at the beach or at an office. Moreover, block parties and city farming have become trends in Helsinki's food culture. Nowadays, several districts have block parties which include pop-up restaurants and music. Additionally, there are plenty of cafes, from traditional to trendy, in the city centre of Helsinki as well as near the seashore. During summer, cafes are also located on the streets and markets. (Visit Helsinki 2015c.)

## 7.2 Tourist Destination

All in all, there are 42 conferences that include some relevant information about Helsinki. Out of those 42, 38 focus on Helsinki as a tourist destination and 24 take the professional point of view. However, a single conference can include information on both, the tourist and the professional point of view as well as on several of the sub categories.

It is shown in the following figure (Figure 3) how the different categories ranked in Helsinki being presented as a tourist destination. The results are explained according to Figure 3.

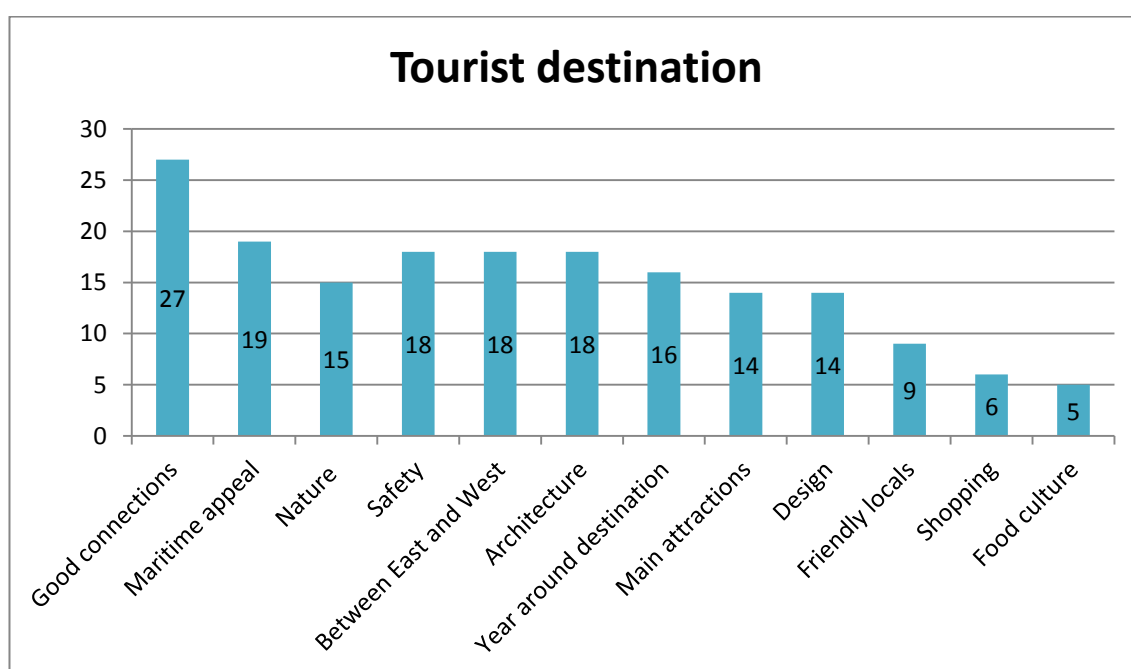


Figure 3: Tourist destination

The majority of conferences, 27, include information about Helsinki's good connections, which is the highest number. As shown below in Figure 4, 20 conferences specifically focus on the fact that everything in Helsinki is easy to reach. Furthermore, its accessibility from international destinations is mentioned. The least important are the destinations that are nearby such as Stockholm and Tallinn. This is due to the fact that conference delegates mostly do not have enough time during the conference to visit one of those places unless it is part of the actual conference.

The accessibility of a city is important for conferences since the delegates highly value getting to the destination easily as well as having good connections within the destination.

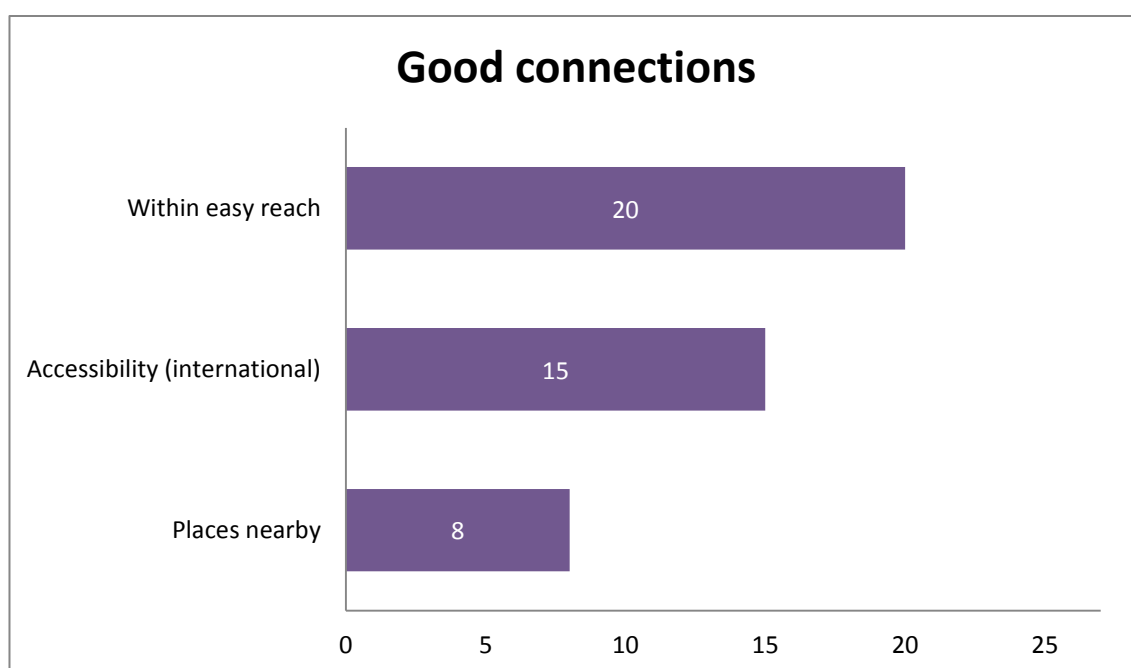


Figure 4: Good connections

The second most stated category is nature and maritime appeal. Helsinki's location close to the sea is mentioned by 19 conferences, whereas the nature is only explained in 15 of them. Helsinki's location close to the sea and its islands are a well-known part of Helsinki's scenery.

The safety of a city is a very important factor when choosing a destination for a conference. Therefore, it is one of the third most mentioned factors of conferences that took place in Helsinki with being mentioned 18 times. The same amount of conferences focus on Helsinki's location between as well as the influence from the East and West. This increases Helsinki's interestingness and focuses on its unique cultural aspects. Architecture is mentioned by 18 conferences as well and consequently ranked third too.

Information about seasonal activities and the climate is found in 16 conferences. Most international conferences that took place in winter mentioned the climate and temperatures, so that foreign visitors are better prepared for their stay in Helsinki.

Helsinki's main tourist attractions are found in only 14 of the conferences. The author was surprised by the low number because it was expected that more conferences would include information about Helsinki's main attractions since conference attendees become leisure tourists after the conference programme for a day has ended.

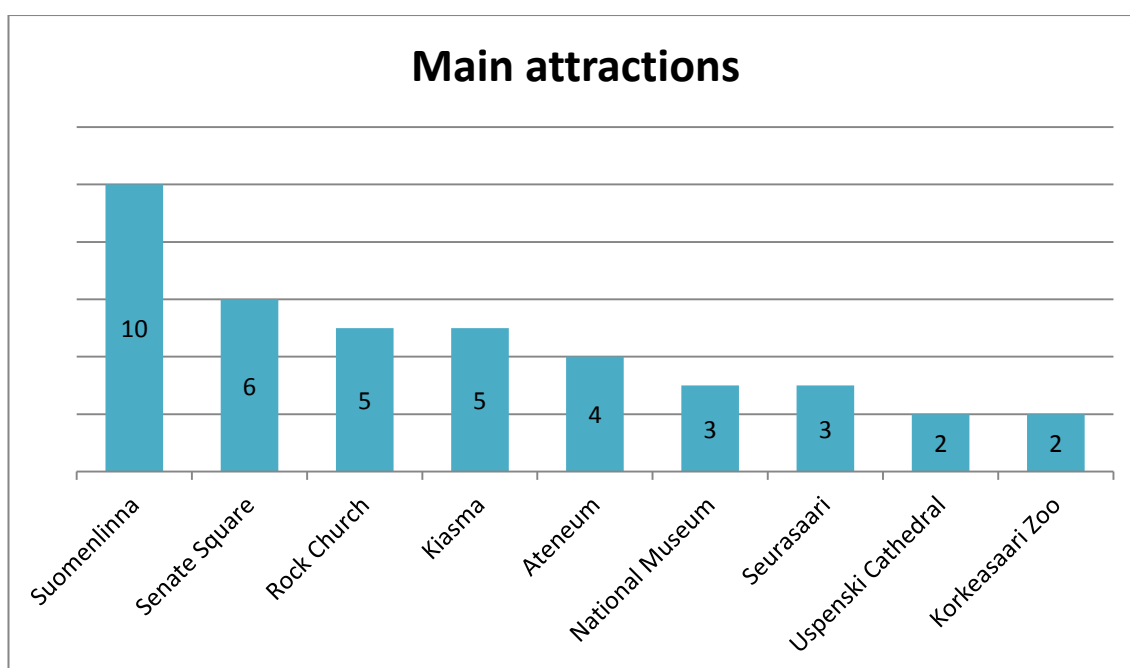


Figure 5: Main attractions

Figure 5 shows that the majority of those 14 conferences that include information about the main attractions focus on Suomenlinna, since it is a very popular tourist attraction. Suomenlinna is followed by the Senate Square and the Rock Church. Three museums are included as well, Kiasma, Ateneum and the National Museum of Finland. Seurasaari ranks fifth together with the National Museum of Finland. The Uspenski Cathedral and Korkeasaari Zoo are least occurring in the information about Helsinki.

The same amount of conferences includes information about Finnish design. Out of those 14 conferences, 9 mention design in general, whereas another 9 also mention that Finland was the World Design Capital in 2012. Conferences that took place in 2013 mention the World Design Capital more often than conferences that took place in 2014 or upcoming conferences in 2015. This is due to the World Design Capital taking place closer to 2013 and therefore more relevant.

Design is followed by the friendliness of local people. Conferences focus especially on the willingness to help and the good English skills of locals. Shopping is referred to in 6 conferences. This includes mainly information about shopping malls and department stores as well as their opening times. The least information can be found about Helsinki's food culture. It is included in 5 conferences. The main focus of them is on traditional Finnish food and dishes.

### 7.3 Professional

Helsinki is known to be recognized conference city with good conference facilities, such as Messukeskus and Finlandia Hall, as well as possibilities for pre and post conference tours and other social programmes. Furthermore, Helsinki is considered to be innovative. Finland is well known for its high standards of education, for example its success in the Pisa study, and technology, such as the companies Nokia and Rovio. Helsinki is the centre of Finnish economic and business activity, including several headquarters of both, Finnish and international corporations being located there. Moreover, Helsinki has been ranked the most liveable city in 2011. (Visit Finland, 2015; Visit Helsinki 2015f.)

Helsinki is presented from a professional view point by 24 conferences. As shown below in Figure 6, out of those 24 conferences, 15 describe Helsinki with a professional view point and 9 conferences focus on education and technology. Additionally, Helsinki's success in studies, especially Helsinki being ranked the most liveable city in 2011, is mentioned by 8 conferences. The professional point of view includes Helsinki's position as a globally recognized conference city as well as conferences that took place in Helsinki before. Furthermore, knowledge of the field of expertise of the conference topic belongs to the professional view point. Out of those 15 conferences, 9 focus on Helsinki being a recognized conference city and another 9 acknowledge its connection to the conference topic. Out of the nine conferences that include information about education and technology, five focus on technology and four on education.

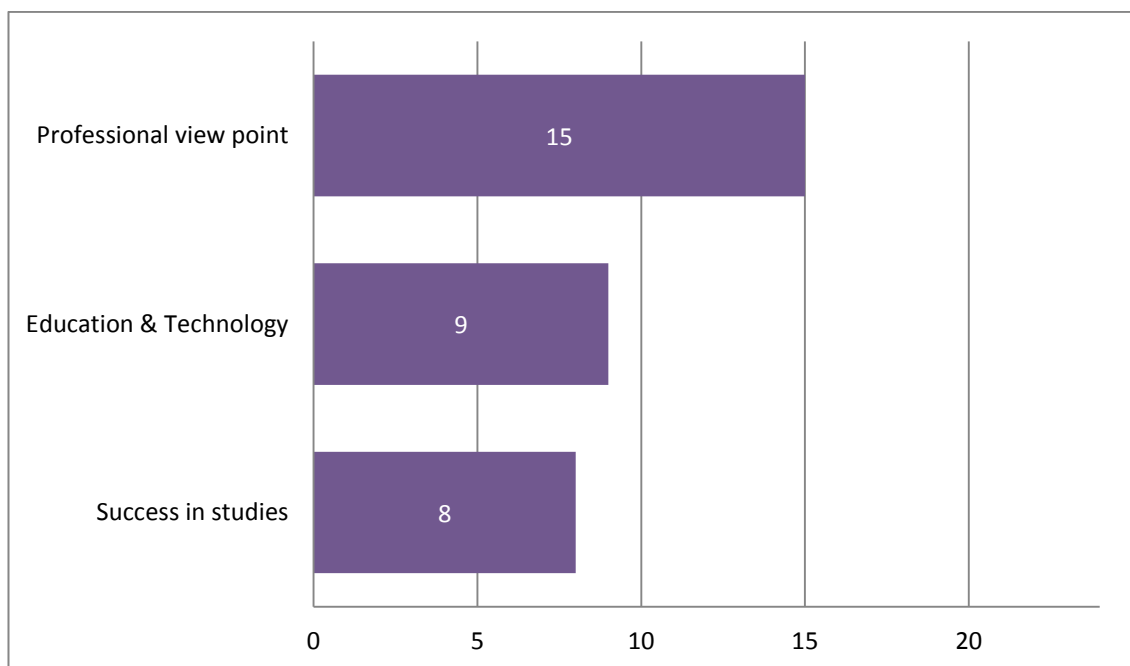


Figure 6: Professional point of view

## 8 Conclusion

The research conducted in this thesis revealed that conference organisers present Helsinki mostly as a tourist destination. However, the majority focuses on professional attributes instead of tourist attractions. Moreover, a significant amount of conference organisers described Helsinki with a professional view point.

The majority of conferences describe Helsinki as a city with good connections, both, from abroad as well as within the city. Furthermore, Helsinki's location at the sea is often included in the description. Moreover, Helsinki is considered to be a safe city by conference organisers. Information about architecture and the influences from the East and West is included as well. Main attractions are mentioned in fewer conferences than information about seasonal activities and the climate. Finnish design is also included in some descriptions of Helsinki. The least referred to topics are food culture, shopping and local people.

Concerning Helsinki being presented from a professional point of view by conference organisers, it can be said that the majority include information about Helsinki's expertise of the conference topic as well as being a recognized conference city. Additionally, the high standards of technology and education are referred to as well as Helsinki's success in studies.

In Helsinki, business travel accounts for approximately 48% of the total tourist overnight stays. Therefore, the share of business and leisure tourism is almost equal. Conference tourism is one of the fastest growing forms of business tourism, with its peak season being autumn and spring. Business and leisure tourism are closely related since both require certain facili-

ties and business tourists become leisure visitors after their working day. Therefore, also a social programme is considered to be important and conference organisers also pay attention to attractions and sights that the host city has to offer.

Business travellers are more likely to return to the conference destination when they had a satisfying experience and a good image of the destination. Conference attendees value experiencing a new culture as well as visiting a destination and leisure activities. A destination image includes a person's thoughts and impressions of a certain destination. The overall image is formed through different sources, such as websites, books, a destination's brochures and personal experience, whereas actual visitation creates a more realistic image. Successful business events can help to improve a destination's image. Additionally, the destination image is of importance for conference organisers when a destination is chosen.

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